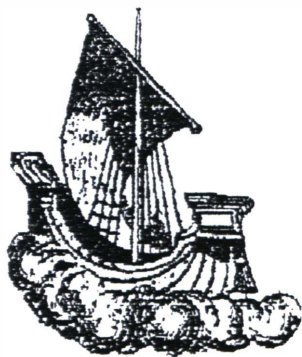




Magonia 48

Interpreting Contemporary Vision and Belief

January 1994

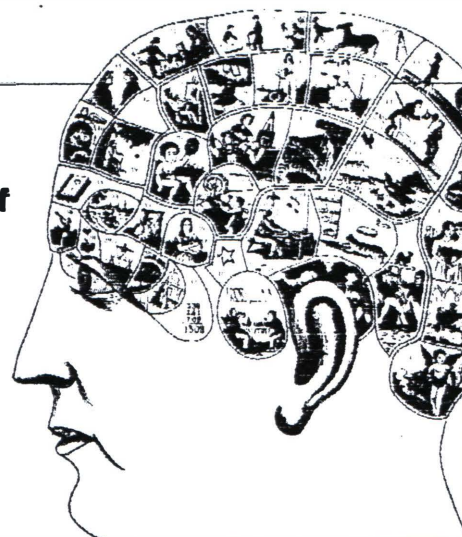
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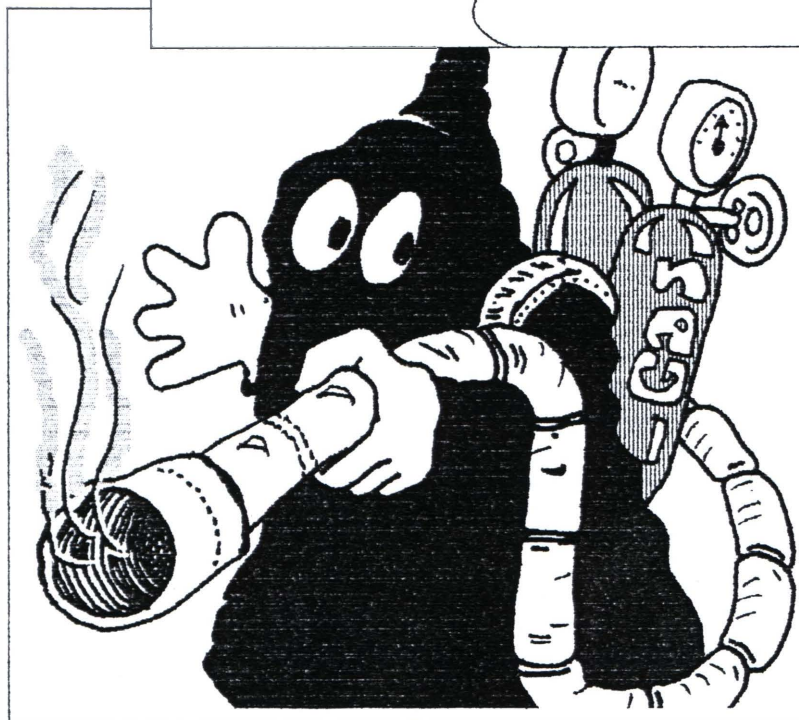
Letters



BackPage



25 Year Ago



**Willy Smith re-examines the Phantom
Anaesthetist of Mattoon, and concludes
there's life in the old case yet.**

Magonia

Interpreting Contemporary Vision and Belief

MAGONIA 48

(MUFOB 98)

JANUARY 1994

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Peter Rogerson's Northern Echoes



THERE are those of our readers who have been waiting for the sceptical *Magonia* writers to get their come-uppance: one day these northerners [shome mishtake shureley - Ed.] blind to reality will have a paranormal experience of their own. That will wipe the smug smiles off their faces, I hear. Well, you've got your wish, for your Brigantian correspondent has had what many people would regard as a paranormal experience: a nice piece of precognition.

To understand what happened all you need to know is that living alone I tend to have the radio on very low throughout the night (it may deter the greys, you never know). As sometimes happens, in the early hours of 1st October 1993 I was half awoken to hear the tail end of a news report, in which I learned that Lennox Lewis had beaten Frank Bruno, the fight being stopped in the seventh round. As my interest in boxing is minimal I didn't take much notice and went back to sleep. I was slightly surprised that the morning bulletin didn't repeat the news, even more surprised that half an hour later I learned that the fight wasn't going to be held till that night. I jokingly mentioned to a colleague at work that Lewis would beat Bruno in seven rounds. Those of you who follow boxing will know that this is just what happened.

However, if anyone hoped that I would react to this by suffering from 'conceptual rape', they will be disappointed. My reaction is that it is an amusing and interesting experience, and feel no need to evoke pseudo explanations such as precognition or synchronicity. It isn't unique. For example Keith Hearne reports (*Visions of the Future; an investigation of premonitions*, Aquarian, 1988) the story of Leslie Brennan who experienced a newsflash of

the Flixborough chemical works disaster a few hours before it happened, and a couple of people who had premonitions of the Kennedy assassination in one case had seen a newsflash and in another had seen a placard before the event. It might be tempting to think that this proves one can foresee the future, yet, as I have argued before, the absence of evidence for really spectacular events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union or the Year of Three Popes culminating in the election of a Polish Pope, makes the idea very dubious indeed.

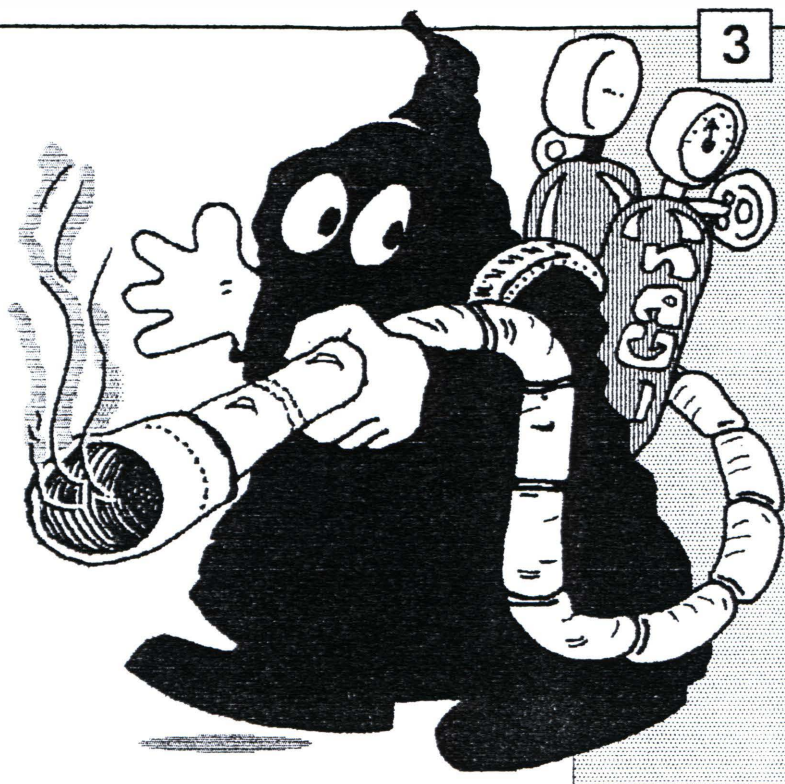
Furthermore, the idea involves very serious paradoxes. If one wants an 'explanation' of such experiences, then strictly tongue-in-cheek, we could point to the 'many worlds' hypothesis and argue that perhaps occasionally we can have fragmentary access to these. Most of the 'other worlds' are so unlike our own that nothing that looks paranormal comes out of them, but a few are more or less identical to ours except they are a little out of synch, so that out January 1st is their January 2nd, or vice versa. Presumably then there are no 'out of synch' worlds where the Berlin wall fell, though, if you take the doom predictors at face value, there were an awful lot of them in which the big bomb went off. Where the many worlds idea seems to really fail is its inability to explain why the world we experience is this one, and not one in which Bruno beat Lewis, or Kennedy was not assassinated, or the Moscow coup succeeded.

I would have to take issue with Phil Edwards contention (Letters, *Magonia* 47) that I really meant that virtual experiences don't happen. Agreed, they do not involve

Continued on page 6

willy smith

mattoon revisited



THE MAIN claim to fame of Mattoon, a central Illinois town of about 16,000 souls, is the alleged activity almost fifty years ago of a prankster never apprehended or identified. During a short period at the end of the summer of 1944, more precisely from 31 August to 12 September, this individual, and perhaps some copycats, terrified young women by releasing some kind of gas in their rooms, gas that was never identified either, but that gained him the name of the Phantom gasser of Mattoon.

It is truly remarkable how the episode of the so-called "Phantom Anaesthetist" of Mattoon has become a stanchion of contemporary ufological (and other) literature, as a classic example of mass hysteria. Furthermore, it has been used to support opposite contentions. For example, one writer emphasises the differences between the onset of UFO waves and the start of mass hysteria flaps. (1)

Another quotes it to stress the thesis that cattle mutilations have a naturalistic interpretation, (2) namely, the hysteria of the farmers, rather than a bizarre explanation due to UFOs or other preposterous circumstances, thus denying the objective existence of UFOs. Years ago, in a series of papers appearing in the *MUFON UFO Journal*, the Mattoon incident is cited and used to maintain that "mass hysteria probably has nothing to do with UFO reports". (3) Probably not, unless one is suggesting that the connection is that both are imaginary events.

Even now, the Mattoon Anaesthetist, like the phoenix, rises from his ashes and is offered again as a convenient example of hysterical contagious illness (4) and somehow associated with other forms of irrationality such as the Anti-Satanist panic.

I wonder how many of those who so freely talk about the "anaesthetist of Mattoon" in order to affirm one point or another have really gone to the original literature to inform themselves. Not to be like them, I secured at great cost a copy of Donald M. Johnson's initial paper (5) and my investment has paid handsomely. Before going into the nitty gritty, I hasten to point out that from the very beginning the intentions of Johnson,

who at the time was an undergraduate student at the University of Illinois, (6) seem to have been to "prove" a case of mass hysteria, regardless of the evidence that he himself had found in Mattoon. This is an impression that assaults the reader from the first line when, for instance, Johnson tells that:

"The story begins on the first night of September, 1944, when a woman reported to the police that someone had sprayed her."

All the preceding remarks are false: the story did not start on 1 September, and she did not report it to the police, but to a friend and to her husband, who called the police.

Now to the details, all provided by Johnson. (5) According to him, and after a careful reading of his paper, the true chronology is as given in Table 1.

A grand total of 25 cases in 13 days. However, the weight of all these cases is not the same: the case of Mr and Mrs B, for instance, occurring before the key case (Mrs A) supposedly triggering the total sequence, cannot be suspected, as Mr B was the one to feel sick and smell the gas. This was not hysteria, but a real event. AS for Mrs C, she was with her daughter, so one could suspect a case of *folie à deux* but without a stimulus, as again this was prior to any publicity. It seems more rational to accept that this was also a real incident. Considering now Johnson's key case, Mrs A and her daughter, it is also an episode with two witnesses and, moreover, Mr A coming home much later and unaware of previous events, saw a man run from the window. Hysteria, or plain fact? I think there is no doubt, unless we postulate that Mr A had obscure motives to gain public attention: a prowler was prowling, and scared Mrs A and her daughter. Thus, the sequence, if imaginary, was triggered by a real incident.

No judgement can be advanced for the other cases, as there are no more details. But we have made progress, as we have easily disposed of the totality of the initial incidents. Perhaps the others were prompted by the sensationalist handling by the media, particularly the local paper, the *Mattoon Daily Journal-Gazette*, the only paper with a large circulation in the city and,

■1. BALLESTER OLMOS, V.J. 'Tienen relacion los avistamientos OVNIS con la poblacion?', *Stendek*, 27, March 1977, 31-39

■2. STEWART, J.R. 'Cattle mutilations: an episode of collective delusion', *The Zettetic*, 1, 2, 1977, 55-66

■3. SWORDS, Michael D. 'Hysteria and UFOs: is there a connection?', *MUFON UFO Journal*, No. 196, July-August 1984

■4. SANDELL, Roger 'Satanism Update', *Magonia*, No. 46, June 1993, 13

Date	Name	Comments
31 August Thursday	Mr and Mrs B	Not reported to the police until 3 September; not published in newspapers until 5 September
31 August Thursday	Mrs C and daughter	Not reported until later; not made public until 5 September
1 September Friday	Mrs A and daughter	About midnight asked a friend to call the police. Husband, two hours later, saw a man run from a window and called police again.
2 September Saturday		Mrs A and daughter's incident appeared in newspaper.
3 September Sunday		No paper appeared.
4 September Monday		Labor Day, no paper appeared.
5 September Tuesday	Mrs D and Mrs E	The cases of Mr B and Mrs C appeared in newspaper.
6 September		Three more cases.
7 September		No cases reported.
8 September		Four cases reported.
9 September		Five cases reported.
10 September		Seven cases reported.
11 September		No cases.
12 September		Final case reported.

TABLE ONE



according to Johnson, read at the time by 97% of the Mattoon families. In fact, there is a curious detail here, glazed over by Johnson: the story appeared on the front page (2 September) in a column headed "Mrs A and daughter first victims". How come? Only one incident was known at that time, apparently considered by the paper and the police as a serious attack, and yet we find this "first" as if the reporter knew there were more to come. Johnson dismisses this as an error, but such a contention does not resist analysis. Too many people see the headlines of a newspaper before it goes to the presses. Was the whole thing an organised effort to bring national attention to Mattoon, otherwise a faceless community in the state of Illinois?. Fortunately, Johnson provides us with detailed statistics of the coverage, in square inches of newspaper space, devoted

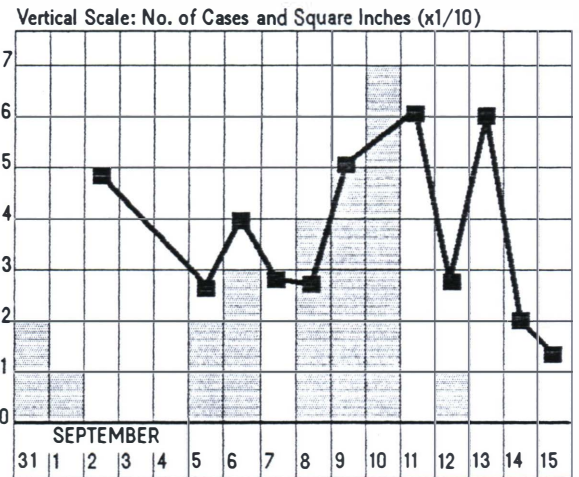
TABLE TWO

Date	Day	Number of cases	Square inches	Comments
31 August	Thursday	2		
1 September	Friday	1		
2 September	Saturday		47	September case printed - headline
3 September	Sunday			No paper appeared
4 September	Monday			Labor Day, no paper appeared
5 September	Tuesday	2	26	31 August incidents
6 September	Wednesday	3	40	Headline
7 September	Thursday		29	Headline
8 September	Friday	4	28	No headline
9 September	Saturday	5	51	Headline
10 September	Sunday	7		No paper appeared
11 September	Monday		62	Headline: "few real"
12 September	Tuesday	1	28	Last case printed: no headline
13 September	Wednesday		59	Comical twist
14 September	Thursday		19	
15 September	Friday		14	Paper dropped story

to the series of events. Although to judge the value or truthfulness of an issue by the press coverage in square inches of print is common usage for the practitioners of the soft sciences, it only indicates the editorial bias of the media, of which we have a daily example in the morning news. And in this case, if there was foul play behind the scenes, the statistics of the column coverage by the *Daily Journal-Gazette* seem to bear out this possibility.

It is interesting to correlate those numbers to the actual dates and the number of incidents, as reported to the police (see Table 2)

The significance of this information in supporting a journalistic confabulation becomes glaring when presented in graphic form, where the points represent the newspaper coverage and the bars the number of witnesses



The press coverage started on 2 September, when Mrs A's incident was reported on the front page with a sensationalist headline: "Anesthetic Prowler on Loose", out of character for the rather conservative Mattoon newspaper, and continued unabated in every issue until 15 September when the story was dropped. The number of reported cases reached a maximum on 10 September, which was the peak of police activity in their efforts to catch the culprit in flagrante delicto. Only one further incident took place (12 September), and since the *Daily Journal-Gazette* was still carrying the story, it seems self evident that the prankster (and his copycats) were suddenly discouraged by the police attention.

Thus, contrary to Johnson's assertion that there were two hypotheses (either a "gasser" or "hysteria") to explain the facts, we have already three: (i) mass hysteria, triggered by an incident real or imaginary; (ii) an organised newspaper buildup, as a prank or for more serious unknown reasons; and (iii) a real "anaesthetist".

Before discussing those possibilities in some depth, let's take a moment to examine, as Johnson does, the nature of the reported gas used by the attacker. He says that it did not affect others in the room, a patent falsehood when one considers Mr B's case (31 August), where the husband was the first to feel sick. Johnson also informs us that one of the effects reported, vomiting, was independently verified, but dismisses this as a symptom of hysteria, as was the excited condition observed in the victims. In fact, the original article (5) transcribes a pertinent passage by Janet: (7)

"I choose, for an example, what happens to a woman somewhat impressionable who *experiences a quick and lively emotion*. She instantly feels a constriction of the epigastrium, experiences oppression, her heart palpitates, something rises in her throat and chokes her..." (emphasis added).

What Johnson apparently did not realise is that this scholarly opinion requires the a priori existence of a stimulus and the fact is that the appearance of the symptoms as reported is prima facie evidence of the reality of the incidents. Had the victims remained calm and collected after going through such an experience the investigator would have been correct in suspecting foul play. Since the vomiting was a fact, as well as the independent testimony of husbands (or maybe husbands are not independent) that they had really smelled gas, it follows that at least the three initial incidents (31 August and 1 September), and perhaps some of the others had an objective reality.

From a perspective of almost fifty years, it is hard to make a guess as to the real nature of the gas, but from the details reported by Johnson, it is conceivable that the "gasser" simply used natural gas, that he either carried or that he just released from sources existing at the homes he visited.

Johnson, whose experience in sociology was probably no more than an introductory course, (6) also considers the victims as a group, and marvels that there are few children in his sample, after he rejects some because of parental influence. We are given some demographic information which is partially transcribed in Table 3

TABLE THREE

Objective characteristics	% in sample	% in Mattoon
Sex: women	93	52
Age group: below 10	0	14
10-19	0	18
20-29	37	17
30-39	16	15
40-49	21	13
50-59	16	10
60-69	10	7
over 70	0	6
Education: grade school only	71	58
some high school	29	32
some college	0	10
Indices of economic level:		
home has electricity	80	95
radio	80	91
refrigerator	28	46
telephone	33	60

It follows that the majority of the victims were women of poor education and modest economic level, their ages peaking for the 20-29 group. No attacks were reported the two high-income areas of Mattoon and all the cases seem to have occurred within a uniform socio-economic group. As shown in Table 3, the demographic factors are quite at variance with those corresponding to the population of Mattoon at large, as indicated in the last column.

The unavoidable conclusion is that the selection of the victims was not random. This peculiarity leads to two and only two possibilities:

- (1) selectivity by the perpetrator (i.e. hypothesis (iii) is correct);
- (2) selectivity due to the susceptibility of this group (hypothesis (i) is correct).

Let us go back now to the three possible hypotheses and by using Occam's razor attempt to arrive at a reasonable solution.

(i) Mass hysteria

Johnson concludes that "*the hypothesis of hysteria fits all of the evidence, without remainder*". This is only wishful thinking, because nothing is further from the truth if we are going to believe what the same Johnson has reported. The initial incidents, which indeed took place, have not been explained. The word "first" in the headline of the Mattoon Daily Journal-Gazette remains cryptic and, in fact, opens even now interesting possibilities. The independently witnessed symptoms, like vomiting and a great degree of excitation, were unexplained then and now (how could they have happened if there was NO gasser to provide the stimulus?). The lack of cases on 7 and 11 September represents an anomaly, compounded by the fact that the graph shown in Johnson's paper apparently peaks precisely on 7 September, perhaps because he refers to telephone calls listed in the police blotter and not to verified incidents. As shown in Graph 1, the actual number of incidents peaked on 10 September and, in spite of hammering by the newspaper until 15 September, only one more case was reported (12 September).

The hysteria hypothesis is contrived, and not only fails to satisfy the evidence, but doesn't explain how people who didn't know each other, apparently belonging to the same socio-economic and educational level, and perhaps living in the same neighbourhood, could come up with similar descriptions (as, for instance, in the cases prior to 5 September).

All of this suggests the activity of unknown parties localised in a given area. Moreover, the victims were young females, all but one married (hence, friend psychologists, no great possibilities of hallucinations due to sexual frustration), corroborating selectivity by the perpetrator very unlikely to occur with an imaginary gasser.

Of course it may well be that initially, as supported by the evidence provided by the first cases, one or more unknown parties (the copycat is always a possibility), started to terrorise young women perhaps as a prank, perhaps for some obscure sexual motivations, but became scared when the community over reacted, and the state police came into the act. To this day, he is probably recalling with nostalgia these incidents of his youth, and maybe smiling secretly, if he reads the ufological press, every time he is mentioned in pro or con arguments on the existence of UFOs.

The later cases were very likely caused by the journalistic influence and no more than hysterical episodes prompted by the presence of prowlers, which during the period were reported at the rate of 8-10 a week. Author Johnson vehemently denies this, and states that "*the hypothesis of hysteria fits all the evidence, without remainder*". Sadly, this points out

■ 5. JOHNSON, Donald M. 'The "Phantom Anesthetist" of Mattoon: a field study of mass hysteria', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 40, 1945, 175-86

■ 6. The official records of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign show that Donald Max Johnson was a student there, and that he graduated on 15 June 1952 with a Master's degree in Education. In 1944 he was very likely a freshman, with rather questionable qualifications to investigate the Mattoon affair, which explains the shortcomings of his article. Dr R.P. Hinshaw, listed by Johnson in his acknowledgements, was an Instructor in Psychology during 1944-45, and therefore was able to guide Johnson during the critical period, sponsoring the publication of his article in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*.

■ 7. JANET, P. *The Mental State of Hystericals*, Putnam's, New York, 1901

■ 8. William of Ooam (d. oiroa 1349): English scholastic philosopher, a Franoisoan, sometimes called the Invincible Dootor. He argued that reality exists solely of individual things and that universals are merely the signs by which the mind represents reality to itself. They are identified with abstract knowledge and do not touch reality. Logio, then, deals with signs rather than with realities. Some matters, such as the existence of God, immortality and the existence of the soul are the object of faith alone (*The Columbia Encyclopedia*). Ooam's razor can be expressed as: "The simplest explanation that covers all the facts is the right one."



that Johnson's main goal was to document a "true" case of mass hysteria come what may, even if it required ignoring that the initial cases were real, and doesn't say much for his competence as an investigator.

(ii) A journalistic scam

The second hypothesis is daring but quite tenable. That word "first" in the 2 September issue cannot be lightly dismissed, and we must keep in mind that after all, the press controlled the publicity given to the affair, and finally spiked it when it got out of hand. It is quite possible that the original cases (which could have a simple explanation, such as a gas leak) inspired a young reporter to make a name for himself (remember, we are in 1944 during the war years) and devote considerable space to the phantom anaesthetist in the *Mattoon Daily Journal-Gazette*. The story was picked up by out-of-town newspapers, among others the *Chicago Herald-American* which, according to Johnson, handled the story most thoroughly and most sensationally, and pretty soon it was out of control. Perhaps after a while the editor of the paper got wise, but what could he really do, except what he did? That is, backpedal and write "few real" in the 11 September headline, then change the tone toward the jocular (13 September), move the story to page 6 on 15 September and finally let it go by the board.

There is another piece of evidence in favour of this hypothesis: the lack of motivation. Nothing was stolen, the circumstances did not offer gratification to a peeper, and even the victims did not have a reason to come forward with false claims. Yet, our postulated ambitious newspaperman had everything to gain and nothing to lose, a true statement as demonstrated by time. Too bad we don't even know his byline!

And finally, one must remember that prophetic "first" which appeared on 2 September!

(iii) A flesh-and-blood gasser

As we have already indicated, the first 3 cases (31 August and 1 September) definitely were real incidents, each one with two witnesses and, since they were not publicised until later, they could not possibly have triggered the incidents that followed. As I am not a psychologist, I can hardly argue with Johnson about the suggestibility of young females of low education and social status. But I can assert that items not printed in the local newspaper certainly could NOT have influenced anyone.

The arguments advanced by Johnson on the

nature of the gas are specious, to say the least, and attempt to prove that since the characteristics of the alleged gas are impossible, so is the reality of the anaesthetist. However, when the complaints of the victims and their symptoms are considered in some detail, it becomes very likely that the gas could have been regular cooking gas, accidentally or otherwise released in the rooms. In fact, Mr B reported asking his wife if the gas had been left on when he woke up sick in the middle of the night. I rest my case.

The fact that people reported seeing a prowler who might have been the anaesthetist is dismissed without further ado by Johnson, since prowlers are frequently reported in Mattoon. I agree, but how can one distinguish on sight between a regular prowler and the gasser? The plot of police calls shown in (5) shows almost equal numbers for both events.

Conclusions

What is the bottom line?

Johnson's conclusion that the Mattoon affair was "entirely psychogenic" is unwarranted and not supported by the evidence. The idea of a journalistic scam is very attractive, has possibilities, and should not be ruled out. It would be interesting to go back to Mattoon and dig in the morgue of the *Daily Journal-Gazette* to obtain further information about the reporter(s) covering the case. As for the third possibility, the existence of a real perpetrator, it follows from the details of the first three incidents, and perhaps could be corroborated by further study of the records. It is also clear that some of the later cases could have been prompted by the influence of the media, but I doubt that a true hysteria epidemic could have been turned off so suddenly. However, such an abrupt termination would be expected if we had a gasser that felt cornered by the police and decided it was safer to quit.

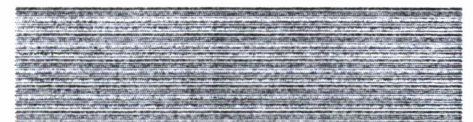
In a direct application of Occam's razor, (8) I favour a combination of (ii) and (iii), as reasonable and fitting the information as it has reached us. But one thing is certain: it has been in Johnson's paper for all these years for anyone to read. It was not a sequence of imaginary events triggered by another imaginary event, not even by a real one (made public only after some of the crucial cases had already occurred). If mass hysteria means what I think it means, and if there is such a phenomenon, definitively the case of Mattoon is not an example; in fact, it is no more than a "gasser". ●●●

NORTHERN ECHOES: Continued from Page Two:

and geography, but they certainly take place within - at least on occasion - the brain. In both the cases of Morton Schatzman's 'Ruth', and the Medjugorje visionaries, studies have shown brain changes. All our perceived world consists of internal models of reality; usually indeed they are constructed, in part at least, from information supplied by the senses. But even in normal perception we must suspect that memory and reconstruction play a larger role than is often thought. People who have suffered from some

forms of brain damage can suffer from a cortical blindness in which, though photons continue to impinge on the retina and nerves transmit messages to the brain, the brain cannot construct visual images, so the patients believe themselves to be blind. Careful experiment can show that they still have a subliminal visual sense, albeit rudimentary. In virtual experience our mental models are not built up from sensory information but, one presumes, from memory and imagination. As the example referred to by John Rimmer

elsewhere in this issue shows, the models built up can be every bit as 'realistic' as those constructed from conventional sensory perception. In a very real sense we could argue that all our perceptions and memories are fictions, though fictions which on the majority of occasions are well informed by, and stick very close to, external reality.



The 1952 Saucer Wave: A Story Behind the Story

"Just Cause"



ONE OF the most extraordinary periods in the history of the UFO phenomena occurred during the summer of 1952. Literally thousands of flying saucer reports inundated the Air Force, police departments and newspapers with around-the-clock activity. Central to this wave of reports were sightings over Washington, D.C. Three major radar trackings of "unknowns" and a number of minor ones plagued Air Force and civilian air traffic controllers. Jets had to be scrambled to confront the invasion of radar pips. In some cases pilots did detect strange lights over the city but as quickly as they would appear the objects would disappear, leaving officials scratching their heads over what had happened. During this three-week stretch banner headlines alerted the nation to the return of the saucers (having been in the news at various times since 1947).

The Air Force statistics for this time were extraordinary. 1952 produced 1501 UFO incidents, the highest of any year of the Air Force's twenty-one year investigation. 303 of these were considered "unidentified" after investigation, also the highest of any year by a very large margin. The next highest was 1954 with a mere 46 unknowns of 487 reports (*Project Blue Book Fact Sheet*, 1968).

Beginning in April and through May and June 1952, sightings began a steady rise. Part of this could have been due to an article that appeared in the 7 April 1952 issue of *Life* magazine called "Have we visitors from outer space?" by H.B. Darrach and Robert Ginna. The article was an oddity itself in that it was done with Air Force co-operation and that it came very close to endorsing the notion of UFOs as extraterrestrial devices. Cases were declassified and released to the *Life* writers. The magazine arranged to forward sightings to the Air Force from *Life's* readers (*The UFO Controversy in America* by David Jacobs, 1975, p. 69). The Air Force's policy prior to this had been to discourage such thinking, that the phenomena were under control and that there

was nothing to the idea of visitations by beings from space. The *Life* article was a virtual invitation for saucer interest to escalate.

Blue Book cases from 16-30 April totalled 54. May reports totalled 68 incidents. June reports increased again to 125 (Project Blue Book, Case Index, National Archives, 1976). When questioned by the press about the *Life* article, the Air Force did not issue the usual denial but instead maintained that the article was correct and the conclusions were *Life's* (Jacobs, 1975).

Given the degree of encouragement to broadcasting saucer incidents, the Air Force must have expected to receive a rising influx of sightings. There had always been elements in the Air Force interested in promoting an extraterrestrial explanation for flying saucers but they were, prior to this time, under control. One example of this was the "Estimate of the Situation", a Top Secret document which was said to have strongly supported saucers from space but was ultimately rejected as an Air Force policy statement (*Just Cause*, September 1992).

Captain Edward Ruppelt, who became head of Project Blue Book in 1951, was the most liberal of the Air Force's UFO investigators to that time. He had promoted an upscale programme, was open-minded in his approach, and while not an alien advocate, had regarded some of the sightings as genuine mysteries.

Question: If Air Force policy had been to discourage a flying saucer/outer space connection publicly, why suddenly open the door to a situation similar to that of the summer of 1947 when the press went absolutely wild with saucer stories and questions on what the government was doing about it? In other words, there wasn't a compelling reason for a policy shift in April 1952. The consensus of various UFO histories is that Ruppelt's serious approach to UFOs caused the Air Force's top brass to lend more support to Blue Book by being less secretive and more open and analytical. Ruppelt said in his book (*The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, 1956) that *Life's* pro-saucer statements were "unofficially inspired" by

This article is reprinted from *Just Cause*, issue 36, 1993. *Just Cause* is the journal of CAUS, Citizens Against UFO Secrecy. This US organisation, unlike some others claiming to be battling against Government cover-ups, conducts a rational campaign to disclose UFO information which is genuinely being withheld by the authorities. It has uncovered a great deal of fascinating data, and we feel this article will be of particular interest to *Magonia* readers.

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several very high-ranking Air Force officers at the Pentagon, "so high that their personal opinion was almost policy". Was the reason for these "personal opinions" being made a public issue based on the possibility that an "answer" to the saucer mystery was evident to the Air Force, something which hadn't been proven to that point, or could there have been a more mundane reason which will lead to the core of a new explanation as to why the 1952 wave evolved as it did?



JULY reports totalled 401, a massive increase in the monthly intake by Blue Book. Only 81 of these came from 1-14 July, leaving 320 from 15-31 July. This huge output from the 15th on is important as we shall see later.

In the process of doing historical sweeps of the press, CAUS has located a great deal of information on the 1952 wave. A comprehensive search of New England area newspapers has produced one thousand pages of clippings from July-August alone. Our search has taken five months of weekly six-hour sessions looking at microfilm in various libraries. One cannot get a grasp of the time without following news events day by day. Putting the saucer stories in context this way might reveal facts that were previously overlooked. "New" old sightings were found. Commentaries and opinions expressing the mindset of the population at the time were illuminating. And something else was found that was not anticipated.

During July, just prior to the saucer wave becoming prominent, the national media showed a great deal of concern as to the country's preparedness for national defence. Numerous stories were noted in virtually every newspaper searched regarding the lack of air spotters for the Air Force. "Air Spotters Rally to Fill Gaps", said the *Berkshire Eagle* (Ma.) for 15 July. "Not Enough Skywatchers", said the *Lowell Sun* (Ma.) for 14 July. "Operation Skywatch' Flops: Volunteers Few", said the *Holyoke Telegram-Transcript* (Ma.). And on and on this theme went in the New England press between 14 and 16 July. The problem appeared to be so universal that it would be fair to project this nationally. CAUS has compiled forty pages of clips so far and we expect to see much the same elsewhere.

What was all this about in the days before the great saucer wave? A fair amount of explanation is necessary.

In the early 1950s the US government had several basic units comprising its air defence system:

- Early Warning Radar Stations - The purpose being of course to detect enemy aircraft electronically at a distance.
- Ground Controlled Intercept - Consisted of radar stations designed to follow enemy aircraft and direct US fighter planes towards them for attack.
- Fighter Interceptor Aircraft Bases - Launched US fighters on missions.
- Another important element was the Ground Observer Corps, which was in essence groups of thousands of average citizens in volunteer service to the government for the purpose of visually spotting potential enemy aircraft overflying the United States. The GOC had begun as an experiment in September 1949, called "Operation Lookout". The results had been encouraging to the point that the Air Force felt a Ground Observer Corps could play an important role in plugging holes in the existing radar network. The

ultimate goal of the program was to have 24-hour sky coverage by one million volunteer spotters at 24,000 observation posts (The Air Force by A. Brophy, 1956, p. 91). And with volunteers, the cost of the programme would be much less than paying professionals who could not be employed in such large numbers.

The GOC worked under joint control of the US government and civil authorities. The Air Force would handle the tactical end of the programme, such as training the volunteers and designing procedures for reporting. Civil authorities would take care of personnel and record keeping. The chain of command in a given state would begin with the governor. Under him would be a state civil defence director, then a director for the state Ground Observer Corps. The GOC director then had a GOC co-ordination officer who knew the appropriate locations and personnel in various counties. Within the counties would be area supervisors who would be responsible for the activation and operation of GOC posts in their areas. Finally, there would be a post supervisor who would oversee the individual post and volunteer personnel assigned to it. The GOC post was generally a tower of sufficient height to give an all-sky view. A small shelter on top contained communications equipment, spotting equipment (binoculars, etc.) and other aids to relay the results of visual interception of unknown aircraft (*Air Force Manual* 50-12).

Part of the GOC as well was the Filter Center, a facility run by both military and civil authorities. This is to where the individual ground spotter would report his/her observation of an unknown. Staffed mainly by civilians, the Filter Center would receive phone calls, record information, plot it on large table maps, and perform other related tasks. Since it was also part of the military chain of command, the Filter Center had an Air Force Officer-in-Charge who made sure things went smoothly.

Until 1952, the GOC posts operated on a man-available basis. Rarely were posts fully staffed to provide complete 24-hour coverage of the sky. Generally the volunteers worked 2-3 hour shifts. The overnight, or graveyard, shifts were the most difficult to staff as they required being awake during most people's sleep time.

It is important to know all of this because few people now know what the Ground Observer Corps was and how it operated. Nor do they know how a GOC air alert called "Operation Skywatch" raised the curtain on the great saucer wave.

Operation Skywatch was an attempt by the Air Force to put the GOC on a 24-hour schedule for the first time. The alert was earmarked for 14 July 1952. One problem with GOC operations at this point was the lack of enough volunteers to complete the staffing at various posts across the nation. The Air Force was trying to push the programme along and wanted to prove to leaders in Washington that the GOC was prepared to meet the challenge of completing 24-hour sky coverage to supplement the existing radar network. It was a difficult task. One town civil defence director in Rhode Island, Judge James Watts, called the attempt at 24-hour coverage "asinine" (*New Bedford Standard-Times* (Ma.), 15 July). He maintained that "people have to work for a living and don't have time", especially since the US was not in a state of war.

In fact the Air Force rallied the GOC directors to get local newspapers involved in getting the public to volunteer. President Truman made a personal for vol-

If you were
an Air Force
intelligence
officer how
would you
motivate
the public
to go
outside for
two to
three hour
shifts and
watch the
skies?
Answer:
Flying
Saucers!

unteers in a statement released in Washington on 12 July (*Springfield Union* (Ma.), 13 July). As mentioned earlier in this report, it was very obvious that the GOC people were having difficulty everywhere.

Operation Skywatch was carried through but the results of the 14 July alert were "spotty" (*Providence Journal*, (R.I.), 18 July), "a deplorable situation and a sad lack of interest..." (*Taunton Gazette*, (Ma.), 16 July), "a flop in New England" (*Holyoake Telegram-Transcript* (Ma.), 15 July), "Observation Post Apathy" (*Portland Press-Herald* (Me.), 18 July). The *Worcester Telegram* (Ma.) of 18 July called the public "apathetic and fatalistic" about the danger of enemy attack.

The Air Force said that only about thirty per cent of the posts in New England operated (*Lowell Sun* (Ma.), 16 July). The Eastern Air Defense Force at Stewart Air Force Base, New York reported that only slightly more than 1500 posts in the New York area were manned out of 4000 (*New York Herald-Tribune*, 15 July). This after a major effort was launched by the Air Force to make GOC work.

A dilemma was now apparent. Question: How does the Air Force motivate the population to become involved with the GOC; to, in effect, stand and stare at the sky without pay for hours in anticipation of an enemy attack that may or may not ever occur? "Things aren't very good", said Major Richard Curtis, the commander of the New Haven, Connecticut Filter Center (*New York Herald-Tribune*, 15 July). The Air Force was committed to the GOC programme, having decided in May not to reconsider its decision to proceed with Operation Skywatch. The request to reconsider came from a San Francisco meeting of the National Association of State Civil Defense Directors, an influential group which could not sway the Air Force. The final decision had been made by General Hoyt Vandenberg, Air Force Chief of Staff (*New York Times*, 3 May 1952).



HE WAVE: On 16 July, barely a day after Operation Skywatch began, the great summer 1952 wave was off and running. An escalation in the number of saucer sightings reported to the Air Force had been in progress since April but the press had paid little attention to them until this time.

Two veteran airline pilots, W.B. Nash and W.H. Fortenberry, had reported seeing eight huge discs zipping along in formation near Norfolk, Virginia on 14 July while piloting their Pan American DC-4. At first six discs manoeuvred in echelon formation below the airliner. Making a sharp turn, the six were then joined by two other discs, all of which soon zoomed upward and disappeared. Wire services transmitted the story nationwide with little comment by the Air Force. The accounts were loaded with superlatives about the credibility of the witnesses and the quality of the report.

A United Press story transmitted on the 17th, and quoting Captain Edward Ruppelt, indicated that sixty saucer reports had been received in two weeks and that 1952 sightings were double the rate for 1951. The Air Force, in effect, nudges the spiralling situation upward with this statement. Lt. Colonel Richard McGee, Director of Civil Defense for the Dayton, Ohio area (the home of Project Blue Book), said that he was alarmed by the increase and added, "There is something flying around in our skies and I wish I knew what it is"

(*Portland Press-Herald* (Me.), 18 July).

Sightings continued to increase. A 19 July story (*Boston American*) indicated that sightings were received from New York, Vermont, Colorado and Washington. The only mention of Air Force comment was that they "take seriously all such reports".

Some press sources were provided instructions on informing the public on how to spot and report the flying saucers (*Brockton Enterprise* (Ma.), 19 July). One (*Fall River Herald-News* (Ma.), 21 July) wondered why none of the sightings in those reported to that time were by members of the Ground Observer Corps.

For any of this to mean something, we must explain where all of what we've said so far comes together. The Air Force enacted a programme of 24-hour sky coverage. Its major problem was getting volunteers to man the country's observation posts. A very short time after the Air Force's programme gets off to a poor start, flying saucers begin to creep into the press with little resistance from the authorities. Think about it. If you were an Air Force intelligence officer and a major, funded programme of skywatching was heading for the hopper, what would you do? How would you motivate the public to go outside for two to three hour shifts and watch the skies? Answer: Flying Saucers! The lure and fascination of potential visitors from space would motivate most rational, thinking people into wanting to skywatch from an equipped observation post with the appropriate training. A chance at seeing one of these things, not to mention fulfilling a patriotic duty as well, would be irresistible to many citizens during the early 1950s.

This is not an idea with easy evidence. To direct this situation, the government would not have to do much of anything. If flying saucers come along at a convenient time, let the stories get out - to a point. Do not react to them. Allow the press to sensationalise, arouse the public interest, thus getting recruitments and volunteers up. Once the situation appeared to be going out of control, the Air Force could step in, hold a press conference with the full weight of authority behind it, and kill the wave with convincing-sounding explanations. Planting mildly misleading stories cannot be ruled out either as a way of keeping the wave, and the interest in it, rolling along.

The press could be fed instructions (i.e. training) to be printed for the public, seemingly for flying saucer spotting, but, on a more practical level for the Air Force in the long term, GOC spotting. The whole business could be called a form of passive manipulation that would be hard to trace to its source, but would be highly effective for the Air Force in its consequences. The GOC would be better staffed, the saucer wave will have served a positive purpose for the Air Force, and when the wave had outlived its usefulness, debunk it.

Is it plausible?

Press coverage of the 1952 wave exploded on 22 July with the information that saucers were seen visually and on radar over Washington, D.C. The attention given to this by the press was unlike anything seen since saucers began to be sighted in 1947. Hardly a newspaper in the country did not say anything about it. Continued bafflement characterised Air Force statements in the first week of the wave. "A thorough investigation is being made by the Air

The whole business could be called a form of passive manipulation that would be hard to trace to its source, but would be highly effective for the Air Force

technical Intelligence Center", the Air Force told the Associated Press (*Boston Globe*, 23 July).

On the 23rd, the first GOC reports came through. Charles Buck, a Westfield, Maine GOC spotter, saw three silver discs at high altitude. This was followed by another GOC observer's report from Nahant, Mass. of two discs (*Brockton Enterprise* (Ma.), 23 July). Rather than keeping the GOC reports "within the company" and away from the press, as one might have expected the Air Force to do normally, they were freely getting out to the media now. No serious objection was yet apparent from the Air Force, thus more encouragement for volunteers to enrol with the GOC and potentially to report flying saucers and make headlines. More reports followed from Cleveland GOC spotters. And more yet from Chicago. The commander of the GOC Filter Center in Chicago, Captain Everett Turner, said he received a flying saucer report *every hour* from his volunteer spotters (*Springfield News* (Ma.), 25 July).

On the 24th, the Air Force, specifically Captain Edward Ruppelt of Project Blue Book, emphatically denied that the saucer wave had anything to do with putting the GOC volunteers on 24-hour duty (*Providence Journal* (R.I.), 24 July). Yet in an interview with Colonel Richard McGee, the Dayton, Ohio Civil Defense Director in charge of the area incorporating Ruppelt's headquarters, he was asked whether or not there was a connection between Operation Skywatch and the flying saucers. He responded that to his knowledge no specific reason had been given "but that could be the answer" (emphasis added) (*Portland Press-Herald* (Me.), 18 July). Evidently some military people were thinking about linkage between the two, as we are now. Without a smoking gun though, it could only have been unuttered speculation for most leaning to this idea.

The build-up of reports and publicity continued on for the next few days. The reluctance of the Air Force to debunk reports continued as well, though civilian scientists began to object to the presentation of the sightings as mysterious. Dr Donald Menzel became prominent during this time as a key saucer critic.

The wave roared on at a fever pitch as press coverage on the 28th revealed a second weekend of strange sightings over Washington. Jet interceptors again were foiled in attempting to identify the intruders. The wave coverage was now taking on an alarmist tendency and serious questions were being asked as to whether or not the military could handle the situation effectively. For example, according to the *New York Times* (29 July), jets did not respond to the sightings over Washington until nearly two hours after the first radar trackings were reported, a remarkable admission by the military in the midst of the Cold War.

Now something had to be done to douse the fire that the Air Force had allowed to build. A press conference was quickly convened on 29 July, led by Major General John Samford, the Air Force's Chief of Intelligence.

The saucers, General Samford assured the press, were no threat to our national security. While conceding that some sightings were difficult to explain, the Air Force nevertheless balanced this with a variety of possible explanations for most of the reports. The "temperature inversion", a weather condition known to dupe radar into registering "solid" targets that were not really there in a physical sense, became the explanation of preference for the Washington radar trackings.

Mirages and exaggerations were meted out to the press as further likelihoods. The Air Force was careful to protect the reputations of its personnel by asserting that credible observers were seeing relatively incredible things. The message was clear enough that those "incredible things" were incredible as a function of subjective impressions, weather conditions and the fallibility of technical equipment.

With the weight of authority behind it, the press conference effectively nullified the alarm raised by the media. Since the saucers had not landed on the White House lawn, nor did decidedly mysterious hard evidence surface, it would have been difficult for pro-saucer advocates to offset the official pronouncements. Some of the press quickly seized on this shift in attitude with headlines like "Public Starting to Accept Theory Discs are Illusions" (*Quincy Patriot-Ledger* (Ma.), 31 July).

The Blue Book report total for August was 278, a significant drop from July. Many did not accept the Air Force's explanations but the aftermath of the press conference distinctly reduced 1) the alarmist nature of the coverage which had begun well into the wave, and 2) the level of coverage which had sloped downward from the beginning of August onward.



REPORTS towards the end of July appeared indicating that not only had GOC volunteers increased but that the Air Force enlistments were up. The *Springfield Union* (Ma.), 30 July, said, "Air Force Tops its July Quota", with the enlistment allotment "far over" its goal. In the month after the wave, GOC volunteers in Massachusetts increased from 3500 on 14 July (the first day of Operation Skywatch) to 7600 (*Springfield Union* (Ma.), 25 August). Several hundred new recruits signed up in Rhode Island (*Providence Journal* (R.I.), 17 August). By no means was the GOC up to its goals but a valiant upward trend had begun.

Another remarkable admission was made by the Air Force's Vice Commander of the Eastern Air Defense Force, Brigadier General George Smith, that low-flying aircraft could easily avoid radar detection around the United States "and must be observed and plotted by ground observers" (*New York Herald-Tribune*, 1 August). One would not expect publicly admitted clues by the Air Force, then actively at odds with a powerful Soviet Union, on how to defeat our national defences, unless of course the Air Force regarded a depleted GOC as a more serious national security issue. Equally remarkable was an admission two days before as to the inability of Air Force radar at Andrews Air Force Base in Washington to detect the unknowns reported on radar by the civilian scopes at Washington National Airport (*Attleboro Sun* (Ma.), 29 July). Of what possible good would these admissions be unless they were for a higher purpose - to encourage support for a stronger Ground Observer Corps.

It is folly to be absolute about anything relating to UFOs. We can only follow a trail of information left in the wake of the 1952 saucer wave to see if there is a reason for why it happened the way it did. We are suggesting that the problems with the Ground Observer Corps programme were serious enough that using publicity about flying saucers as a tool to enhance the programme seemed not to be such an outrageous idea

The
reluctance
of the Air
Force to
debunk
reports
continued,
though
civilian
scientists
began to
object to the
presentation
of the
sightings as
mysterious

as it sounds. The wave has been a strange loose end demanding clarification. There is as yet no smoking gun but many hints are on the record.

It would be difficult to say whether the government had planted false stories with the press to encourage the interest to continue in flying saucers, therefore in skywatching, therefore in volunteering with the Air Force. We can't point any fingers but we can't rule it out either. The true anomalies, besides the saucer reports themselves, lie in the lack of timely Air Force response to the wave that was consistent with previous policy; the seemingly scandalous admissions by the military of gaping holes in the technical aspects of US national security, admissions for which the ultimate resolution appeared to be boosting the Air Force's pet programme by whatever means available; and the amount of immediate, behind-the-scenes information coming from the government during the wave, the result being an enthralled public excited about what was going on in our skies.

Do not underestimate the effect of the 1952 wave on popular culture either. While it can be shown to have had a long-term influence on the military (the wave led directly to the Robertson Panel of the CIA, setting the future debunking policy on flying saucers by the Air Force), the influence on the population may have been more profound.

For example, a *Boston Globe* report (7 September 1952) indicated that toy manufacturers preparing for the 1952 Christmas season had noted an "unprecedented and furious upsurge of demand for rocket ships, space helmets, flying saucers and other playthings of an interplanetary nature". American children, it seemed were weary of cowboy and western paraphernalia, and had switched their attention to extraterrestrial travel and visitations. The reason? According to the *Globe*: "The preoccupation with space toys is of fairly recent origin. It started with the mid-summer revival of news stories about flying saucers. Now it has taken on such terrific proportions that it threatens to upset the industry's carefully laid plans for the Christmas shopping rush".

Some television shows had dealt with space themes to this time, the most notable being *Captain Video*, debuting in 1949. But a rippling effect on the popular culture wasn't there until the summer of 1952. Premiering in 1953 were three new space shows: *Atom Squad*, *Rocky Jones*, *Space Ranger* and *Rod Brown of the Rocket Rangers* (*Fantastic Television* by Gary Gerami and Paul Schulman, Harmony Books, NY, 1977). The aim of this is not difficult to fathom; to satisfy the new craze over space initiated by the great wave. Three more space TV shows, *Commando Cody*, *Captain Z-RO* and *Captain Midnight* premiered in 1955. The cinema contributed films like *Invaders from Mars* in 1953, loaded with flying saucer imagery and with allusions to actual saucer reports that had appeared in the press. *Earth vs the Flying Saucers* was another release in 1955. It can be easily argued that these developments had an impact on young minds to the extent of enticing them in later years to becoming involved in the blossoming space programme in the United States.

Optimism for space travel certainly wasn't fostered by the scientific community or the clergy during the time of the sightings. "Trip from Mars Would Take Three Years" (*Quincy Patriot-Ledger* (Ma.), 5 August). "Only Vegetables Can Live on Mars" (*Boston Globe*, 1 August). "Trips to the Planets Doomed" (*Boston Post*, 6

September). "Pope Doubts Man's Ability to Resolve All Mysteries" (*Hartford Courant* (Ct.), 8 September). "Space Flights Put Many Years Away" (*New York Times*, 5 September). If the authorities in science and religion were actively discouraging thoughts that space travel was imminent or that visitations by aliens were ongoing, what else could have fuelled the mania for space at this time? Not much except the flying saucer wave. Whatever one thinks of the phenomenon, it is unarguable that it has had a major impact on culture, in books, in the press and just about every other medium of mass communication. Even today, during ratings sweeps by television and radio, two prime topics are used to garner ratings points: sex and UFOs. Observe broadcasting during the months of November, February and May and one will see an increase in UFO programmes on talk shows. Perhaps we could call this the modern version of passive manipulation - this time by corporations seeking profits rather than the government. (See *TV Guide*, 31 January 1981, "Teen Sex! UFOs! Male Models! Details at 11!".)

A theory of passive manipulation would by its nature tend to be subtle in its origin and execution, allowing the perpetrator to do nothing but sit back and permit situations to evolve that would have reasonably predictable outcomes. With regard to the saucers of 1952, it was not hard to predict how the press and the public would react. Much like more recent years, it was a reaction of intense interest and substantial publicity that for a time progressed in a useful direction for the government. When it passed the point of being acceptable to accomplishing the goals in mind, i. e. relieving the GOC volunteer problem, a quick press conference deflated the ballooning wave.

Whether by serendipity or design, the saucer reports were there when needed by the military. Once used in this manner, and recognising that such manipulation of the phenomena could create bigger problems than it was worth later, flying saucers were reburied by the Air Force as far as the public was concerned. The debunking policy took over again in 1953 and stood until the end of the Air Force's official investigations in 1969.

Many will recall the recent film by Oliver Stone, *JFK*. During one scene the film's star, playing Attorney Jim Garrison, meets a shadowy figure calling himself "X", a former military officer, who describes a series of strange coincidences which led him to believe that President Kennedy had been killed by an internal government conspiracy. One of the coincidences was that the intelligence service of the Army was told to "stand down" during the president's visit to Dallas in 1963. "Stand down" meaning not to react, not to place operatives in the normal security locations to protect the president, not to be alert to potential problems, to go on as if nothing were happening. The result was that the president was placed in harm's way, a form of passive manipulation that, if true, helped to change history in a dramatic way.

We aren't going to revive the controversy over the JFK assassination here. It is simply to emphasise that there are probably many more examples of such passive manipulation on record, that the new spin on an old story isn't such a new spin after all. The answer to the intense publicity surrounding the 1952 saucer wave may have been there all the time, it just took us 41 years to wake up. ●●●

The true anomalies, besides the saucer reports themselves, lie in the lack of timely Air Force response to the wave and the seemingly scandalous admission of gaping holes in national security

Unsettled Ufologists, Part 93

One of the interesting aspects of compiling the *25 Years Ago* column is the perspective it gives on current ufological controversies. You will recall that the very first issue of MUFOB carried a piece chronicling some long-forgotten dispute in BUFORA. And this is a topic that recurs again and again throughout the ufological history of the last twenty-five years - and more.

So what do we have now? Surprise, surprise, a dispute in BUFORA. Resignations, shock, horror. Bitter open letters sent to ufologists, no doubt to be followed by self-righteous justifications from the other side. Quite a few of our readers will have received a copy of a letter sent out by Jenny Randles explaining the reason for her departure from her various official posts in BUFORA. Others will have seen the rather more enigmatic statement in *The Crop Watcher* announcing Paul Fuller's departure.

In a fit of optimism I had hoped that these resignations might have been promp-

ted by disgust over the continuing degeneration of BUFORA's organ, *UFO Times* from a reasonably objective, scientifically oriented journal to a mouthpiece for a range of paranoid tirades and the sad rantings of the mentally ill. However, on reading Jenny's resignation letter (in fairness, I must say that I have not seen a full explanation for Paul Fuller's departure) I find this is not so. It's just the usual bureaucratic backstabbing and personal grudge-bearing that is endemic in BUFORA and most other open-membership UFO groups, where the various officials start behaving as pompously as if they were leaders of major political parties.

Jenny recalls that Jacques Vallée told her that nothing was ever achieved by UFO groups, only by individuals working alone or with close colleagues (and Jenny herself, as much as anyone, has shown the truth of this). Of course, MUFOB and *Magonia* have been saying this for a quarter of a century. But do they listen to us? Never! So book now for 'Unsettled Ufologists', part 94. April next year, I would guess.

John Rimmer ●●●

25 Years Ago (3)

MUFOB number six ended the first volume. My contribution to it consisted of a plea for a centralised UFO data exchange, a UFO library, a UFO literature cataloguing system, and all the other fantasy suggestions for constructing vast data-banks that have been trotted out by ufologists and fortune-tellers any number of times before and since. My excuse is that at the time I was still a green ufologist/librarian and knew no better. The suggestions are still coming from people who should know better, and are a triumph of hope over experience, look at the fiasco of the ASSAP library!

Other features included the first part of a series by John Harney called 'The Search For Physical Evidence', which looked at the Maury Island case. In later years, with the growth of the New Ufologies, the search for physical evidence became rather marginalised; and attempts to examine cases for their physical content became seen as tantamount to uncritical endorsement of the ETH. However, it is a valid theme for critical ufologists, and one to which John Harney intends to return in future issues of *Magonia*. Also looking at hard science issues, Alan W Sharp examined the controversial theories surrounding the Tunguska explosion which was at the time still being promoted by some writers as having a UFO connection.

Volume Two started with an editorial by John Harney defending the popular image of ufologists as harmless eccentrics. I contributed another fairies and folklore piece, but the highlight of the issue was the reprinting of correspondence between US UFO researcher Gary Lesley and Dahl and Crisman, the two witnesses of the Maury Island case. Crisman was one of the people hauled in by Jim Garrison during his investigations into the Kennedy assassination. In the correspondence, Crisman seems to be trying to detach himself from the case, saying at one point "I have never been a man of mystery" - UFO and Assassination researchers may beg to differ!

MUFOB vol. 6 no. 2, (March-April '69) carried a letter from Gary Leslie protesting against the printing of the aforementioned correspondence. Part Two of John Harney's Search for Physical Evidence' looked at 'Angel Hair', at one time a subject of considerable controversy, but now an almost forgotten aspect of ufology.

The Editors also expressed their views on the recently published Condon Report: generally favourable, but it included a lot of waffle. Highlight of this issue was a letter from Arthur Shuttlewood complimenting us on our "vast improvement in expanded vision and consciousness" Oh, dear, what had we done wrong? ●●●

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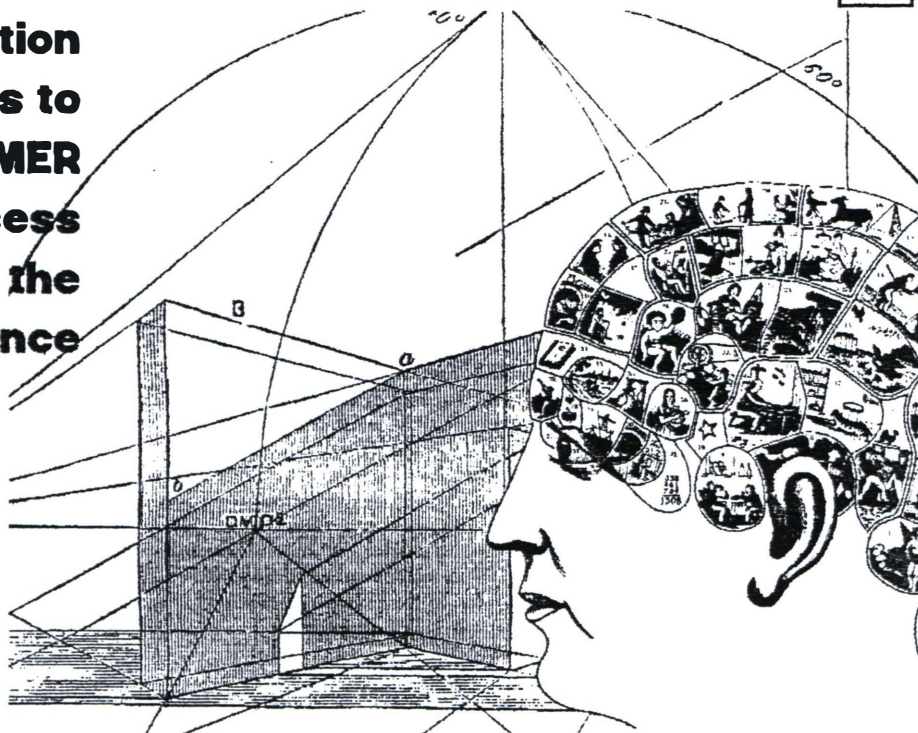
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**A casual conversation
suggests to
JOHN RIMMER
the nature of the process
which constructs the
virtual experience**



virtual banality

IF ANY psycho-social explanations of the UFO and abduction experience are valid, then we need to assume that it is fairly commonplace for the human brain to create realistic alternative worlds, in which cognition is replaced by, as Peter Rogerson has called it, a kind of 'virtual experience'. We must also accept that this 'virtual' world is, to the percipient, absolutely, totally, completely real, with no doubt whatsoever in their mind as to the physical, real-time nature of the experience they are recalling. And further, we must assume that this dramatic mental phenomenon happens to people who are, in every other respect, completely normal, and not just to a section of the population who can allegedly be distinguished via a few psychological tests or simple-minded public opinion polls. Only having accepted this as the 'psycho-' half of the equation, can we then go on in our typically Magonian way to speculate wildly about the '-social' side of things.

To accept that these kinds of 'virtual experience' do happen, and are not symptoms of any particularly abnormal mental condition, it would help if we stepped back a moment from the high strangeness cases which are usually discussed in this context, to see if we could find any 'low strangeness' cases where the mechanism of the experience can be examined free of contentious or bizarre content. So how convenient that your Editor has come across a case which is not a 'high strangeness' abduction case, but rather an example of high banality in the reported content. In this case, the mechanism is

the message.

I suppose we never usually come across high-banality cases, because no-one ever considers them worthwhile reporting to people like you and me. I was fortunate in that this experience happened to a colleague at work, who mentioned it casually in conversation, knowing of my interest in 'odd things'. In accordance with our policy of witness anonymity, I will call this person 'Val' - not the famous Val of Peckham; perhaps she could be Val of Beckenham - someone I have worked with for many years, and who is in every respect 'normal' with no personal or family history of paranormal experience.

The event occurred in September of 1993. Val and her husband had gone to bed and were asleep when the phone rang at about 2 o'clock in the morning. The call was from her husband's office asking him to come in to undertake some emergency work on a mainframe computer. Although not a frequent occurrence, he is sometimes the designated emergency contact for computer problems and has had such calls before; the circumstances were certainly not unprecedented or alarming. He set off for the office, leaving Val trying, with some difficulty, to get back to sleep. After a while she decided she was not going to sleep, so got up, turned on a light outside the bedroom door and started to watch a small TV that was kept in the bedroom. Eventually she did drift off to sleep, waking later to find that both the television and the light had gone off. She tried to switch on a

bedside light but found it would not work. After a few muttered imprecations about a power-cut she heard her husband's car returning, so got out of bed and peered through the bedroom window in time to see his car pulling into the driveway at the front of the house.

This is where reality began to take a knock: the house doesn't have a driveway. At this moment Val comes to the rather perceptive conclusion that she is in the middle of a dream - or as those of us in the know would say, a hypnopompic state, or type-one false awakening. Val decided that in these circumstances the best thing to do would be to go back to bed, pull the bedclothes over her head and try and go back to sleep,

which indeed she does. Now most words in that

last sentence have hypothetical quotation marks around them, as we must assume that Val was tucked up in bed throughout her 'virtual experience'. Later, she woke up 'again' to find the light and TV still on and everything back to normal. So that was it: the world's most boring paranormal experience -

if Val will forgive me saying so. But is there anything that we can learn from this experience that may be obscured in other, more sensational reports?

Val was keen to make the point that, until she saw the physically impossible layout of the garden in front of her

house she had no reason to believe that this was anything other than a physical event happening in real time. And in telling me about this she made a couple of very interesting points: if she hadn't 'heard' the returning car, and had just gone straight back to sleep she would have been very puzzled talking to the neighbours next day about the night's power cut. She would have been adamant that it had happened, they would have been pointing to electric clocks which were still showing the correct time. And more interestingly, she pointed out to me that her grandmother had died some months earlier. What if she had woken to 'see' her grandmother standing at the end of her bed, and maybe conducted a conversation with her? The whole experience had been so real that in such an eventuality it would have been, in her words, "absolutely impossible for anyone to convince me that I had not seen her ghost." It was only by seeing something that she knew was completely physically impossible - the overnight transformation of her front garden - that her sense of logic was able to convince her subconsciousness that this *was* not a real physical experience.

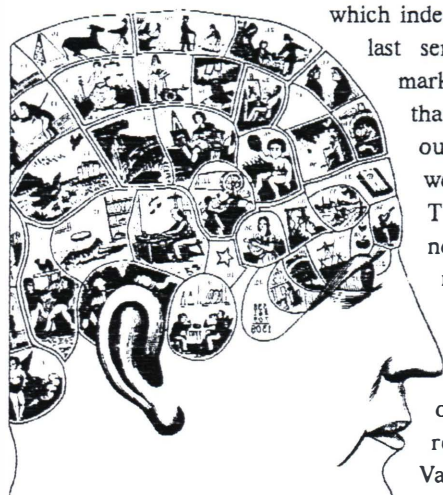
Now, what else would have been needed to convince her of the non-physical nature of her 'virtual experience'. Seeing a dead relative would not have convinced her, she admitted that. Ghosts are, after all, socially acceptable, in this country at least. Real-life ghost experiences may be met with some degree of scepticism, but they are not usually taken as a symptom of mental unbalance - in other cultures they may be

more or less acceptable. I suspect that the USA does not offer quite the cultural acceptability of ghosts that Britain does - do our American readers agree?. How about seeing an alien or UFO? Would Val have accepted that? Hard to say; she feels that the 'virtuality' of the experience was so realistic that she may have done so. It seems likely that the alien and abduction scenario has gained a degree of cultural acceptability to the extent that a visit from abducting aliens is considered more likely than the possibility that a front garden can be relaid overnight. After all, as Val would be quite at liberty to point out, she does work with a person who publishes a magazine devoted to considering just that possibility!

Long-time MUFOB/*Magonia* readers will remember the case of 'Miss Z' which Peter Rogerson and I investigated in 1973 and reported in MUFOB new series 4, 1976. Here was a parallel experience to Val's. Miss Z 'woke' to find three strange alien figures, and some sort of large vehicle, at the foot of her bed. This was only one of a range of strange visions experienced by Miss Z and other members of her family. Here the basic 'virtual experience' was overlayed by a range of contextual references ranging from leprechauns to spacemen. Miss Z was understandably unclear as to the nature of her experience: its 'reality' was as undeniable as Val's, but the content of the experience was assaulting and at times breaking through the limits which Miss Z could accept as real. Whilst unwilling to accept the physical nature of the figures and objects she saw, she was unable to reject the physical reality of the circumstances in which she saw them.

So, far from being the world's most boring paranormal experience, Val's excursion into virtuality is of great interest. Nobody would, I assume, want to argue for the physical reality of the events that Val described, and propose the creation of a new paranormal event: the 'Transient Driveway' phenomenon, in which front gardens are mysteriously covered in concrete overnight, only to be restored to their grassy state in the morning, although we have at least one absolutely reliable witness to such a phenomenon. So is there level of absurdity when we should start doubting that such accounts represent actual physical reality? No. It seems more likely to me that in Val's experience we have the basic mechanism onto which is attached the whole paraphernalia of anomalous experienced phenomena, the tales of ghosts, or grey abductors, or journeys beyond the valley of death. And this experience happened to a normal human being, sane and healthy, in an unstressed situation, disturbed by nothing more than a broken night's sleep. How much more then, would many of the people we see as percipients in abduction cases, troubled by ill-health, family tensions, abused, rejected by their peers, build on to this basic mental template? Almost anything: any complex structure of vision and belief, structured according to their culture, their society, their education, personal hopes, fears and imaginations, all arranged to produce the dramas that are performed nightly on the bare stage of 'virtual experience'.

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FOOTNOTE:

I have no intention of having Val hypnotically regressed to that odd night, nor has she expressed any interest in doing so. I have, however, no doubt that if I did so I could, according to who I chose to hypnotise her and what I said to them beforehand, come up with any story you care to mention, from abduction by grey aliens to spiritual enlightenment in a cosmic epiphany.



LETTERS

Dear John

I read with interest Peter Rogerson's account of the April 1964 case which he describes as "pivotal to the UFO debate". I would agree with his description as it provides us with a rare opportunity to put forward the case for the non-physical nature of the events he narrates. It seems to me that there are two basic tests that any theory or hypothesis must pass before general acceptance; it must explain the facts and, more importantly, should be able to produce accurate and credible predictions from its initial assumptions. If we suppose that this particular case was caused by internal psychological conditions triggered by some external event it would be nice to be able to offer a prediction based on this hypothesis, which of course is what I am about to do.

Peter Rogerson states that the 'Doe's' family home was sited on the side of a mountain - I expect his unnamed researcher will discover that this is the western side, or at the very least that the child's bedroom faces west. The method I use to reach this conclusion is simple: when I read the words "light beam" I reach for my almanac. On April 10 1964 the planet Venus reached greatest elongation (i.e. its furthest point in the sky away from the sun and its highest point in the sky). Around this time it would have been a dazzling sight in the early evening sky with a visible magnitude of approximately -4.1, which is close to the brightest Venus can ever attain, and far brighter than any star, and would have set at around 2330, approximately two hours after the sun. This is the most likely trigger and possible further confirmation could be obtained by tracking the duration of the flap - Venus was continually visible through May, even brightening somewhat, only moving towards the sun and dropping lower to the

horizon during June (in fact by June 15 it was setting only 15 minutes after the sun and so would have been largely lost in the twilight). All the above calculations have been based on Detroit for convenience, but without knowing the exact location of the family home it is unfortunately impossible to make more exact statements (about the probable timing of the first sightings and so on). I do however look forward to hearing more details of this case in future.

Mike White
Churchdown, Gloucestershire.

Dear John

You brought up the famous Fort Itaipu case in *Magonia* 47. Certainly it counts as a very strange and inexplicable CE2, in fact one of the best. The one big problem with it is that there were no first-hand witnesses, or named second-hand ones either.

It first came to public notice through Dr. Olave Fontes in the *APRO Bulletin* September 1959. All other accounts bar one seem to be taken from Fontes. But there are good reasons to doubt the story. For one thing the date is uncertain. Some say it was 4 November 1957, others 5 November. The accounts tell us it was a clear moonless night, whereas a check shows the moon was up and nearly full on either night (it did not set until 0315 on the 4th and later still on the 5th, the incident having allegedly occurred at 0200. Fontes first learned of it from an anonymous military source three weeks afterwards, and he withheld the story until it was 'confirmed' for him in mid-1959 by three other anonymous personnel at the base. The two injured sentries were said to be at a military hospital for two months but Fontes never got to them, nor did he discover their identities; they were never traced.

I also find it strange that as soon as the electricity supply failed all the base alarms allegedly went off (exactly the opposite of what you would expect). Then the supply came on again!

It was during a period of intense UFO activity in Brazil. The US had also just experienced a massive UFO wave in the southwest in early November, and the press was full of UFO reports with E-M effects. Fontes had certainly been duped by Villas Boas a few weeks earlier, and in the Ubatuba incident which allegedly occurred that September (for which, again, no witnesses). One wonders: was he set up by some joker at the camp to cover up a military emergency of some kind? After all, Fontes was known to be very pro-ETH.

Has anyone ever conducted an independent investigation of the Itaipu affair? In Keyhoe's *Aliens from Space* he mentions the involvement of the US military, quoting the 'AF Academy Report'. But this may have had nothing to do with UFOs. Why were the USAF supposedly called in? If it was to do with UFOs, the case ought to be in Blue Book files. It is not. Nor has it appeared in papers released under the Freedom of Information Act.

The only account not drawn from Fontes that I know of is in Menzel and Boyd's *The World of Flying Saucers*, where they quote from an earlier, 1958, bulletin; interestingly, their account does not mention the sentries at all, nor the burns inflicted on them, and dismisses it as a useless third or fourth hand story. Were the sentries added as an extra (by Fontes maybe) to give the story some more strangeness?

I suppose it is too late to get at the truth now, but as it stands Fort Itaipu must have a big question mark hanging over it. Regards, Christopher Allen, Alsager, Stoke-on-Trent.

HOLD THE BACK PAGE

Miscellaneous ramblings from the ufological fringe

Watch the skies - and your wallets

According to newspaper reports, Euro-sceptic Tory MP Teddy Taylor has been looking into a potentially profitable new gravy-train for clued-up ufologists. In a Parliamentary question to Trade and Industry Secretary Michael Heseltine about "unidentified flying objects and aliens in the asteroid belt", and their "implications for public policy" he has been trying to shake loose information on a 'fact-finding tour' (i.e. publically funded bunfight) about UFOs by Euro MP's. Taylor fumes: "These MEP's have been swanning round Europe asking people if they've seen one. They've come to the staggering conclusion that aliens might exist, but that you can't be certain." Amazingly, it appears the European Parliament is considering setting up a Euro UFO Observation Centre as an official European Institution. "This may sound fun, but it makes me angry. My constituents have lost jobs because of the EC's incompetence and nuttury."

It makes us angry too - if the EC (sorry, EU) is throwing money at UFOs, why is none of it coming our way? We are investigating. You have not heard the last of this. Brussels, be warned!

Another Classic Case

It was a fairly desperate bid to try to link Philip Glass's cantata *Itaipu* to the Itaipu UFO case in 1957. Now there is a more direct link between classical music and the world of ufology. George Lloyd, now aged 80, is a composer who has kept the tradition of accessible, tuneful music alive through the serial and aleotonic years of the fifties and sixties, and is at last receiving the recognition he deserves. A new CD of the third of his twelve symphonies links it with a recording of his *Charade* suite, written in 1968, and encapsulating in music some of the preoccupations of the time. Movements include *Student Power* and *LSD*. The fourth movement is called *Flying Saucers*. Lloyd describes it thus: "Spotting 'UFOs'

was a very serious occupation and a lot of apparently intelligent people were expecting one day to encounter an extraterrestrial being. For me it simply became an excuse for writing a scherzo". The CD, with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by the composer, is issued by Albany, (TROY 090, full price).

Pecking Order

In German, Schnabel means beak, and Jim Schnabel is ready to give some ufologists a very painful peck when his book *Dark White* is published in February. Ready with the Elastoplast for wounded egos. The book is described as being about UFO research, a precise qualification which puts us on our guard. Judging from his article on the Napolitano case in the

Independent on Sunday (2nd January, 1994) nobody is going to be spared. An interesting quote in the article, from psychologist John Mack about the impossibility of Linda Napolitano perpetrating a hoax: "Linda is clinically, characterologically [sic], humanly... incapable of such a deception." How often have we heard it? Is what he really means: "Linda is clinically, characterologically, humanly...not as clever as me." Herr Professor is as arrogant as ever!

And how remiss of Perez de Cuella, when being interviewed by a ufologically inclined journalist not to talk about his UFO abduction, instead he kept changing the subject to unimportant trivia like peace in the Middle East, the UN Charter and Saddam Hussain. Some people really don't know what the issues are.

And you thought UFOCAT was a computerised catalogue of UFO reports, eh? That was just to put you off the track, as we can at last tell you the facts, revealed for the first time by *Design Week* magazine. Or are the trademark lawyers already sharpening their quills?



Spaced out feline fodder feeder

A great new product hovers into view, confusing motorists and causing questions in the House. Is it a flying saucer? Is Earth at risk from an alien invasion?

No! it's UFOCAT. This cracking new pet accessory is, apparently, not only a "meal-dish" but a toy with which your cat will "find happiness. It will 'enrich its day' and "spoils your cat, not its meal", it says here.

The dish has a clear plastic cover which "opens at the touch

of a paw", allowing puss to feed itself how much and how often it likes, keeping away uninvited guests such as birds, insects and bacteria (which don't have paws).

There is a warning, though: "It may take a little time and patience for your pet to master the UFOCAT."

So remember, UFOCAT promises "enjoyment for your cat... and you". Brilliant product, absolutely brilliant. And funny. And Swiss.